

VZCZCXRO0996
RR RUEHRG
DE RUEHBR #0709/01 1552238
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 042238Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4433
INFO RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 9613
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 4164
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 7819
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 6247
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 7761
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7549
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0960
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0057
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0086
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0177

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BRASILIA 000709

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [BR](#)
SUBJECT: Brazil: Initial Reactions on Cairo Speech

Ref: STATE 055334

¶1. (U) Summary: In Brazil, President Obama's address to Muslims worldwide has drawn praise for its even-handed approach to the issues of religion and politics in the Middle East from government, congressional, academic contacts and from members of the Brazilian Middle Eastern and Muslim communities whom Post contacted. Most interlocutors had not had time to fully digest the speech, but praised in general terms its tone, setting, and themes. Ministry of External Relations (Itamaraty) contacts praised the speech, and noted that it almost completely aligns with their views on the issues raised. In a significant move, Itamaraty will release an official statement praising the President's effort. Moderate members of the Muslim community, who are generally friendly to the United States, suggested that the speech was exactly the message that was necessary from the United States, and that it will create more space and oxygen for moderate Muslims to speak out, allowing them to come out of the shadows in support of moderate views. End summary.

Mission Prep Work

¶2. (U) In anticipation of President Obama's speech, earlier in the week Mission Brazil sent out a press advisory to media contacts, contacts of all posts within the Mission, including to key members of the large Muslim community. The day before the speech, we forwarded additional materials on the speech to contacts in Itamaraty, Congress, universities, and the Muslim community. In addition, news of the speech was featured prominently on the Embassy's website beginning June 2, and Embassy paid for interpretation allowing the speech to be transmitted live via the Internet on Terra TV. It was viewed by more than 1,000 people live, despite the early time in Brazil.

"Reading our Mind": Reaction from GOB

¶3. (SBU) Under Secretary for Political Affairs Roberto Jaguaribe told Ambassador Sobel that the speech was "courageous." Jaguaribe expects it will create some controversy within the United States, but that it was "very correct." He observed that it presented a very constructive approach to the Middle East and to Muslim audiences around the world, one that Brazil very much shares and to which Brazil will give its support because it represents an approach that will lead to real solutions. He gave particular praise to President Obama's views on dealing with extremism, noting that the speech and the approach outlined for dealing with extremism is much more of a threat to radicals than is confrontation. Jaguaribe also

held out praise for President Obama's comments "denouncing Israeli settlements," which he called the essential element that Israel has to deal with if there is to be progress on what he called "the essential East-West conflict." Jaguaribe also added that the combination of President Obama's criticism of HAMAS with the recognition that the group has a role to play in the peace process was a significant statement and is a view shared by Itamaraty.

¶4. (SBU) Jaguaribe singled out President Obama's comments expressing the desire for a world free of nuclear weapons as a constructive statement. On democracy, Jaguaribe noted that President Obama comments were welcomed, and that he had successfully walked a delicate balance between those who would call it arrogance to presume to speak about a country's internal matters and those who feared President Obama would not defend democracy. Jaguaribe noted that he would be speaking later with Minister Amorim and that he would share Amorim's reaction with the Embassy as soon as he could.

¶5. (SBU) Minister Rodrigo do Amaral, Chief of Staff to Roberto Jaguaribe told poloff that the speech was very well received within the Ministry. From his initial read, he believed the speech mirrored Itamaraty's views. The Ministry was so pleased with the speech, he added, that it would put out a public statement praising it. He also noted that he had forwarded the speech within the Ministry, including to the offices of Minister Celso Amorim and Secretary General (Deputy Minister) Samuel Guimaraes, and that initial reaction had been positive. (Note: Itamaraty had yet to release its statement at the time this cable was written. End note.)

BRASILIA 00000709 002 OF 003

Other Elite Reaction

¶6. (SBU) Ali Kamel, Executive Director for Journalism at TV Globo, author of the book "About Islam: Affinity Among Muslims, Christians, and Jews and the Origins of Terrorism," and an important Middle East watcher in Brazil, called President Obama "brave," observing that the President "does not care about taboos," in reference to the President's mention of the U.S. role in the overthrow of the Iranian government. After some initial doubts that the President would not focus sufficiently on democracy-which Kamel called a "universal and absolute" right-Kamel was very pleased that the president did not shirk from noting the importance of democracy. Kamel also cautioned that he doubted if the Arab media would release the speech in full and advised the State Department to put the whole speech on You Tube subtitled in Arabic, particularly the parts on democracy and women's rights.

¶7. (SBU) Senator Gerson Camata (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party - PMDB, governing coalition, of Espirito Santo) told poloff that the speech was "a great step forward" and "an opening to the Arab world." Camata noted that Obama "should have pressed Israel a little harder on the matter of settlements." (Note: Camata had not read the speech, but had seen highlights on CNN. End note.). He added that Obama "is right that we must isolate terrorists." Camata stated that he said he will make remarks about the speech on Tuesday in the Senate and will send the Embassy a copy.

Arab and Muslim Community Reaction

¶8. (SBU) Within the Arab and Muslim communities in Sao Paulo, reaction was also positive. Lebanese Consul General Joseph Sayah, a Maronite Christian and an influential contact within Lebanese groups of all denominations in Sao Paulo, called the speech "extremely vital," one that opened "a new frontier" in Middle Eastern relations. Sayah added that "the West speaks too often from the head, but for Arabs what counts is the heart...Obama spoke to the heart and masterfully appealed to both emotion and reason in making his case for a new beginning."

¶9. (SBU) Sheik Suheil Yamout, Leader of the Lebanese Future Movement

and a Sunni Muslim noted that the speech was "marvelous." Yamout echoed Sayah when he noted that President Obama put the United States into a closer relationship with the Arab/Muslim World, and showed how to fight terrorism through partnership with moderate Muslims. Sheik Armando Hussein, a moderate Sunni Muslim, noted that it was "a good start in [President Obama's] relationship with Islam." Hussein also noted that it would help make the United States a more credible intermediary with the Islamic World, adding that it was an "excellent a start to a longer and more serious dialogue."

Initial Academic Reaction

¶10. (U) International Relations Professor Thales Castro, from the Catholic University of Pernambuco called the speech, "unprecedented," "remarkable," and "very well-crafted/designed." He stated that it was a "parting of the waters" in the Middle East peace process. He observed that while it was a very positive move by President Obama, he was concerned that it would create tensions with Israel, adding that while Obama's firm stance on settlements was a major step forward toward a two-state solution, he thinks that Netanyahu will not sign off.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Initial reaction was very positive, although most interlocutors begged off giving more detailed reaction due to having read or seen only portions of the speech. Contacts within the government were effusive in their praise, observing how much the President's speech coincides with Brazil's views on the key issues in the Middle East and declaring that it was it was now Brazil's turn to give the President support. The fact that Itamaraty will put out an official statement is a significant indicator that the GOB is extremely satisfied with the direction of U.S. Middle East policy. In terms of Brazil's Muslim community, the moderate members

BRASILIA 00000709 003 OF 003

of the Muslim community heaped praise on the speech, as they believe that it will now be easier for them to make their views more widely known without being criticized for being overly friendly to the United States. Several other key members of the Muslim community, particularly the less moderate ones, asked for additional time to analyze the speech, and they may have different views. We will report their reactions as we receive them. End comment.

SOBEL